

Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department (MCRP)  
Division of Nature Preserves and Natural Resources  
Geocaching/Letterboxing Policy

**SECTION I: BRIEF OVERVIEW**

*Permits*

- A. Placement of a geocache/letterbox in a Mecklenburg County Nature Preserve must be secured with a permit; otherwise it is subject to removal by Nature Preserve staff.
- B. Request a permit application by calling 704.875.1392 or e-mailing [geocaching@mecklenburgcountync.gov](mailto:geocaching@mecklenburgcountync.gov).
- C. After permit approval:
  - a. Geocaches MUST BE published on [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com).
  - b. Letterboxes MUST BE published on [www.atlasquest.com](http://www.atlasquest.com).
- D. Permitted geocaches/letterboxes must be placed and maintained per guidelines.
- E. Geocache/Letterbox permits are FREE to obtain.

*Location*

- A. The exact location of the cache/letterbox must be pre-approved by Nature Preserve staff, whose main concern will be public safety and the prevention of undesirable impacts to natural and cultural resources.
- B. For caches, the EXACT GPS coordinates must be stated on the permit application.
- C. For Letterboxes, CLEAR STEP BY STEP DIRECTIONS (not your Letterbox clue) must be stated on permit application. (Nature Preserve staff must be able to find it before approval).
- D. A map with location marked and a picture of the cache/letterbox container must be included.
- E. The map indicating off limit areas, known as “No Cache Zones,” will be included with your permit application.
- F. Caches/Letterboxes may not be placed in dangerous or inappropriate areas, sensitive habitats, underground, underwater, or more than three feet high in living trees.

*Limitations*

- A. Caches can be placed no more than 100 feet off a designated nature preserve hiking trail.
- B. “No Cache Zones” have been established. Caches/letterboxes may not be placed in these sensitive areas; refer to enclosed map.

**SECTION II: APPLICATION PROCESS**

*Application*

- A. Call 704.875.1392 or e-mail [geocaching@mecklenburgcountync.gov](mailto:geocaching@mecklenburgcountync.gov), to request a Geocache/Letterbox Permit Application.
- B. Application can be submitted by e-mail to [geocaching@mecklenburgcountync.gov](mailto:geocaching@mecklenburgcountync.gov) or in person at Latta Plantation Nature Center, 6211 Sample Road, Huntersville, NC 28078
- C. Upon receipt of application, Nature Preserve staff will send a confirmation e-mail acknowledging receipt of your permit application.
  1. If there is missing information, Nature Preserve staff will contact you.

2. If all information required is provided, Nature Preserve staff allows up to 14 days to process.
- D. Identify the Mecklenburg County Nature Preserve where you would like to place a cache/letterbox
- E. Nature preserves open to hiding geocaches and planting letterboxes:
1. Latta Plantation
  2. Reedy Creek
  3. McDowell
  4. Copperhead Island
  5. Ribbon Walk
  6. Evergreen
  7. Big Rock
  8. West Branch
  9. To place a cache/letterbox at Rural Hill Nature Preserve, please contact office @ruralhill.net.
- F. Nature preserves designated as “No Cache Zones”
1. Auten
  2. Cowan’s Ford
  3. Berryhill
  4. Brackett Bluff
  5. Clarks Creek (opening soon – once open, permits will be issued)
  6. Gar Creek
  7. Flat Branch (opening soon – once open, permits will be issued)
  8. Gateway
  9. Haymarket
  10. Oehler
  11. Stephens Road
  12. Steven’s Creek
  13. Shuffletown Prairie
- G. You must provide:
1. Nature Preserve Name
  2. **FOR CACHES** - exact GPS Coordinates for proposed cache location
  3. **FOR LETTERBOXES** – detailed, step-by-step directions to proposed letterbox plant location
  4. Type of container
    - a. Caches - nano, micro, small, regular, not chosen, multi)
    - b. Letterboxes-
  5. Username
    - a. Geocaching username
    - b. Letterboxing Trail name
  6. Name of nearest trail(s)
  7. Valid e-mail address
  8. Valid phone number (the best phone number to reach you).
- H. Submit applications anytime during the year:
1. **ALL** permits expire at the end of the current calendar year.

2. Permit holders must reapply by Dec. 1<sup>st</sup> to maintain their cache/letterbox without interruption.
- I. Expiration  
Upon expiration of a permit, the permit holder is responsible for physically removing the cache/letterbox container and for archiving it on [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com) or retiring it on [www.atlasquest.com](http://www.atlasquest.com). If the permit holder fails to remove the cache/letterbox, it will be removed by Nature Preserve staff; confiscation will be recorded on the permit.
  - J. No Permit  
If a cache/letterbox is placed in a Mecklenburg County Nature Preserve without a permit, the cache/letterbox will be removed. Confiscation will be recorded, cache/letterbox notified of policy violation.

### **SECTION III: APPLICATION APPROVAL**

- A. Once your permit is approved, you will receive a phone call from the Nature Preserve staff to notify you of your permit approval and the next steps.
- B. A copy of the permit and an official MCPR sticker with permit number will be mailed to you and must be placed on the cache/letterbox container.

### **SECTION IV: PLACEMENT**

- A. Location Regulations
  1. Caches/letterboxes CANNOT be placed in sensitive areas designated as a “No Cache Zone” (refer to map).
  2. Must be placed in a safe environment.
  3. Must be placed within 100 feet of a designated nature preserve hiking trail.
  4. Digging holes is NOT allowed.
  5. CANNOT be placed higher than three feet high in live trees.
  6. **FOR CACHES:** All coordinates must be to the exact location of placed cache (if they change slightly between scouting your preferred site and placement you must update Nature Preserve staff within 48 hours).
  7. **FOR LETTERBOXES:** All directions must be detailed, clearly stated, and step by step (these directions are different from the clue). Nature Preserve staff must be able to find the location before your application can be approved.
- C. Container Regulations
  1. Must be an MCPR approved container
  2. Must have an official MCPR Geocaching/Letterboxing sticker placed on the container with the following information filled in with a permanent marker:
    - a. Cache/letterbox name
    - b. Cache/letterbox owner’s name
    - c. Phone #/e-mail address
  3. Cannot be anything that might cause public alarm.
  4. Must be:
    - a. Non-breakable.

- b. Have some form of latch or other closing mechanism to prohibit content exposure to wildlife.
- 5. Cannot be locked.
- 6. No part of a caches/letterbox or the string/rope holding the container in the tree is to be secured to the tree in any way, using, nails, screws, glue/adhesive, etc.

D. Contents

- a. **FOR CACHES:** logbooks are required.
- b. **FOR LETTERBOXES:** logbooks AND a stamp are required.
- c. May not contain inappropriate or dangerous items. Such items include, but are not limited to, food, medications, alcohol, personal hygiene products, pornography, weapons of any type, or any inappropriate language etc.
- d. Nature Preserve staff have the authority to immediately remove any item held in a cache/letterbox deemed unacceptable.

**SECTION V: REGISTRATION**

- A. You must register your cache/letterbox at [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com) or [www.altasquest.com](http://www.altasquest.com) for it to be valid.
- B. Cache/letterbox owners must state in their web description of the cache/letterbox description location that participants must stay on designated trails and follow all nature preserve rules.
- C. Cache/letterbox owners must include name of specific nature preserve in their cache name/letterbox names
  - i.e. “Control 13 (Latta Plantation)”
  - “Grandkid’s Cache (Reedy Creek)”
  - “Nature’s Gateway (McDowell)”

**SECTION VI: MAINTENANCE REGULATIONS**

- A. Permit holder must maintain all caches/letterboxes and report maintenance to Nature Preserve staff.
- B. Owners are responsible to perform maintenance:
  - 1. Once every four months (3 times per year).
  - 2. After 4 Did Not Finds (DNF’s) are logged.
  - 3. If trails form to cache, location must be moved. Cache/letterbox must be “Disabled” on [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com) or [www.atlasquest.com](http://www.atlasquest.com), until moved to new location
  - 4. New location must be in the same vicinity as original approved location and reported to MCPR for review/approval.
  - 5. Upon approval of new location, cache may be “Enabled” on [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com) or [www.atlasquest.com](http://www.atlasquest.com).
- C. Removing and Voiding Caches/Letterboxes
  - 1. Caches/letterboxes should be maintained as a family friendly cache/letterbox
  - 2. MCPR reserves the right to remove the cache/letterbox at anytime if it is felt that there are adverse effects to the surrounding area or safety concerns.

3. Owners will be notified of the removal within 48 hours and a “Needs Archived” request submitted on [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com) or [www.atlasquest.com](http://www.atlasquest.com).
  4. Once you have removed the cache/letterbox, your sticker must have the word VOID with the date written across it and mailed back to MCPR.
  5. Cache/letterbox must also be archived on [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com) or retired on [www.atlasquest.com](http://www.atlasquest.com).
  6. Caches/letterboxes can be removed at any time at the choice of the permit holder with notification to Nature Preserve staff within 48 hours.
- D. Other Maintenance
1. Bi-Monthly checks by Nature Preserve Volunteers.
  2. Bi-Annual location checks by Nature Preserve staff.
  3. All Caches/letterboxes are subject to random inspections by Nature Preserve staff.

## **SECTION VI: VOLUNTEER SUPPORT**

### A. Volunteers

1. Volunteers will provide bi-monthly checks on each cache/letterbox.
2. This volunteer will confirm each cache/letterbox is;
  - a. Family friendly.
  - b. Will not alarm the public.
  - c. Sticker placement and not expired.
  - d. No social trails are developing.